



LEARNING TO RELAX

When someone is stressed, heart rate, blood pressure and breathing increase. If the stress is not relieved a person becomes vulnerable to health problems and a

decreasing ability to enjoy life. Symptoms of long-term stress include anxiety, depression, sleep problems, high cholesterol levels, stomach and intestinal problems, chronic pain and a lowered immune system.

Many different relaxation techniques can overcome stress improving sleep, digestion, concentration and mood.

Breathe Deeply: Deep breathing counters the effects of stress by slowing the heart rate and lowering blood pressure.

Reach Out: Talk to others -- preferably face to face, or at least on the phone. Share what's going on. You can get a fresh perspective while keeping your connection strong.

Laugh Out Loud: A good belly laugh lowers cortisol, your body's stress hormone, and boosts brain chemicals called endorphins, which lift your mood. Tune in to your favorite sitcom or video, read the comics, or chat with someone who makes you smile.

Crank Up the Tunes: Listening to soothing music or nature sounds can lower blood pressure, heart rate, and anxiety. You also can blow off steam by rocking out to more upbeat tunes or singing at the top of your lungs!

Get Moving: All forms of exercise, including yoga and walking, ease depression and anxiety by helping the brain release feel-good chemicals and by giving your muscles a chance to release tension. Go for a quick walk, do a few flights of stairs, do some head rolls and shoulder shrugs at your desk.

Be Grateful: Keep a gratitude journal. "Being grateful for your blessings cancels out negative thoughts and worries," Use these journals to savor your good experiences. When you start feeling stressed, spend a few minutes looking through your notes to remind yourself what really matters.

Deep Breathing: The Simplest Relaxation Technique

The many benefits of deep breathing include a reduction in stress and blood pressure, strengthening of abdominal and intestinal muscles and relief of general body aches and pains. Deep breathing also releases endorphins and promotes better blood flow, releases toxins from the body and aids in healthy sleep.

Sit in a comfortable position with your hands on your knees and your shoulders relaxed. Inhale slowly while you count to five, expanding your belly as you breathe. Exhale slowly while you count to five, tightening your abdominal muscles to push out as much air as possible. At the end of your breath, pause for two counts.



Deep Breathing as a Spiritual Practice

Breath prayers are tied to the rhythm of our breathing. They help to calm and center the soul. In the calmness we are better able to sense the Divine and hear the Holy.

A breath prayer uses words or images for each slow, deep inhale and each slow, emptying exhale. Let the rhythm of your breath be the rhythm of your prayer.

Before beginning your prayer, assume a comfortable, relaxed position and take a couple of deep breaths to help you transition from secular time to sacred time.

Choose your inhale and exhale words or images. For example: "Fill me" for the inhale and "Free me" for the exhale. As you breathe your phrases, listen with your inner self to what God would fill you with today and free you from.

Provided by Community of Christ Health Ministries Association
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